



The art of getting away from it all **For business owners, the key to having a stress-free holiday is true delegation,** **writes Domini Stuart**

You want a holiday. Goodness knows you need a holiday. But you have a business to run. How can you possibly relax and unwind when you're not there to hold the fort?

The key, of course, is preparation – and not just the kind of preparation you can fit into the week before you leave. The crucial process of delegation is doomed to fail if you leave it until the last minute.

“Some business owners believe that delegating means handing out extra work and running through a couple of scenarios the day before they leave,” says Dennis Roberts, lifestyle coach and director of The Coaching Professionals. “But you can't rehearse for everything that might happen while you're away. True delegation means empowering your people to make decisions for themselves – and that doesn't happen overnight.”

Your business can only run smoothly when you're away if your people have everything they need to do a good job. According to Roberts, these include:

- Clarity of vision. Knowing your goals and priorities provides a framework for making decisions.
- A thorough understanding of exactly what is expected of them.
- Appropriate skills.
- A climate of trust.
- A culture that supports taking responsibility.

Roberts acknowledges that this level of delegation doesn't always come easily to an entrepreneur. “When you've built your business by doing things your way, it can be hard to hand over control and authority. But that's exactly how the most successful managers operate.”

Year-round benefits

As owner of both 'Great Expectations Travel' in Drummoyne, NSW and a Kumon franchise with more than 400 students, Beryl Novice learned to delegate early on.

“Now it’s more of a problem when my second-in-command goes on holiday than when I do,” she says.

She agrees that good delegation is an ongoing process, but points out that there are also year-round rewards. “Not only can I relax when I’m on holiday,” she says, “the rest of the time I’m free to follow Michael E. Gerber’s advice and work on my business rather than in my business.”

Where to go? What to do?

When you’re confident that the world won’t stop turning as soon as you walk out of the office it’s time to consider what you really want to do while you’re away.

Roberts believes that a good holiday leaves you feeling refreshed physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. He also believes you can fast-track this ideal state by choosing a holiday which is the polar opposite of what you do every day.

“Someone with a fairly low-stress and mundane job might want to inject some excitement into their lives with an adventure holiday,” he says. “On the other hand, if you get a daily adrenalin rush from the dramas and stresses of running a business, you could try kicking back on a beach.”

When she’s wearing her travel consultant’s hat, Novice is often asked for ideas for a relaxing break. She begins by establishing what her clients really enjoy.

“Two weeks on a remote island might sound like paradise, but it wouldn’t be right for everyone,” she says. “If you really love shopping or have a passion for golf, you could find yourself bored and frustrated after a couple of days.”

Realistic expectations

Whatever you decide to do, it’s important to be realistic about how much any holiday can achieve. It can’t be more than a temporary respite. And there’s only so much you can comfortably fit in to a couple weeks. Cram too much into your schedule and you’ll get back feeling more exhausted than when you left.

“If you don’t leave time for your mind to wander, you’ll miss out on one of the most important benefits of a holiday,” says Roberts. “Things often take on a new clarity when you’re in a new environment – that’s why so many people make life-changing decisions while they’re away.”

Your stress-free holiday at a glance

Before you go

- Put in as many extra hours as you need to finish major tasks.
- Change the message on your phone and organise an automatic return on your email telling your clients when you’ll be back in the office and who to call in the meantime. You’ll return to a clean slate, and your callers will feel they’re being looked after.

- Give yourself time to catch up and catch your breath by telling clients you'll be back a day later than you really will.
- Establish if and when you are to be contacted. Emergencies only? Ensure your staff are clear about what you consider to be an emergency.

While you're away

- Accept that some things won't be perfect. Try to relax and go with the flow.
- Plan for things you really want to do but don't crowd your timetable.
- Be honest about how you want to spend your time, ask your family or companions to do the same and be prepared for some give and take.
- Take lots of photographs to remind yourself how good it was to get away.
- Have fun. You're allowed!

When you come back

- Give yourself a couple of days to unwind at home before you go back to work.
- Uncertainty can heighten any post-holiday anxiety or depression. Call in the day before you return so you know exactly what to expect.
- If you do dread the thought of returning to work it could be a sign that something needs to be changed. Before you slide back into the old routine, try to identify what that is, and what you could do differently.
- Plan a weekend away so that you have something to look forward to.
- When you return from holiday, you're moving from a slower pace and the freedom to do what you want to the pressure and responsibilities of work. It's normal to suffer 'post holiday blues' for a day or two. Minimise its effects by getting enough sleep, eating well, exercising and focusing on the positive aspects of being home.